A Letter From Dean Johnson

I am very pleased to be asked to write for the SNA Newsletter, especially as I am looking at stepping aside as dean when a new dean is selected. The best and most fulfilling part of my job as dean has been working with outstanding students. Seeing students start at the beginning of their program—regardless of whether it is an undergraduate or graduate program—be both excited but anxious about the challenges that lie ahead. And then, over time seeing the confidence and competency grow, and finally emerge as a future leader in nursing. Taking the long look backward, it has been a privilege to have worked with so many talented students who went on to be make important contributions to the health of our country and internationally.

The future of the School of Nursing is exceedingly bright. The faculty and staff have collectively accomplished a lot in a short period of time. The school is top rated and will continue on that trajectory. Policy relevant research will be further developed because we will continue to recruit world-class researchers and collaborate with other schools within GW and outside of GW. Building our research capacity will enable the school to develop a PhD program in the future. We will also work to continue to strengthen our academic-clinical partnerships building on our relationships with GW Hospital, Medstar Washington Hospital Center, and Inova. In addition, we will continue to work internationally in Haiti, Ecuador, South Africa, Thailand and other places as the opportunities arise.

I have had an exceptional career and been involved in many nursing policy issues, developed new programs, forged innovative relationships, and been exceedingly fortunate to work with the best faculty and staff ever. I have had the best job at each step of my career and found joy and meaning in my work every day. I am proud to be a nurse and will continue to support the school and look forward to being more involved with students as my current responsibilities move to the next leader of the school.

Jean E. Johnson, Ph.D. RN, FAAN

Don’t let an opportunity pass you by

During my first semester in the program, spring 2013, we were offered the opportunity to apply for a one-week service trip to Ecuador, scheduled during our summer semester. I thought it would be amazing to go on a service trip but assumed it was out of the question; I mean, we had a full course load that summer and if there was anything I had learned thus far in the program, it was that a full course load meant three tests, two papers, 15 initial blackboard posts and 30 responses due each week. Well, you know what they say about assuming, right?

Come to find out, quite a few of my fellow classmates applied for and were accepted on the Ecuador trip. After that, I promised myself that I would never let another opportunity pass me by and one year later, I was on a plane headed down to Haiti for GW’s all nursing medical mission trip. When the opportunity to go to Haiti presented itself, I jumped and made sure I applied for it. The process, from submitting an application to finally getting on the plane, wasn’t easy. It took time, hard work, and dedication. The trip even took place during our winter break, which basically meant starting school a week early. Even though the trip wasn’t gift wrapped in a teal box with white ribbon, and I had to really work for it, I would not give the experience up for the world.

Thomas Edison once said that opportunity is missed by most people because it’s dressed in overalls and looks like work. So, don’t let the fear of work scare you from pursuing an opportunity, it could change your life!

Ashley Strasheim
Cohort 5
Making it to the other side: How I went from nursing student to RN in two months

Like the monumental task of eating an elephant, transitioning from student to RN was accomplished one bite at a time. Although the GWU BSN program was the most draining and exhausting of my three degrees, I was being prepared in big and small ways. I was pinned on December 14th as a member of cohort 4, passed the NCLEX that I took on January 16th, and was sitting in orientation as a new employee on February 18th. I am employed as a RN on the Total Joint Unit at Virginia Hospital Center (VHC) which is the same unit on which I preceptored.

On my last day of preceptorship, the nurse manager on the unit said of me while I was surrounded by nurses on the unit saying goodbye, "Mary Lou does not know it yet, but she is one of our new nurses." How I went from being a former English teacher and office worker to someone a nursing manager wanted on her unit was not a tale of the big things but a story of the little things. The nursing manager never quizzed me on lab values or side effects of medications. What she told me later after I was hired was that I went the extra mile as a student because I asked to speak to the stroke coordinator on another floor and asked to work a 13th shift even though only 12 were required.

My advice is, yes, you absolutely need to know the lab values and side effects of the medications, but do not forget to be kind and work well with others. During my series of interviews to work at VHC, I was instead asked how I got along with others and for examples of resolving conflict. They are looking for positive people with good attitudes, which can actually be seen in their tag line of their logo.

Do not super-stress about the timing of the NCLEX or what to study. The best thing I did was to watch the Kaplan videos on "The Decision Tree". It put everything into perspective so well that I wrote in the evaluation that "The Decision Tree" videos should be watched by students in the first semester of the program, which would have made deciding on the famous "best" answer on tests so much easier. To study for the NCLEX, I went to the library every day for two weeks and watched the videos on medications which I knew were a weakness for me.

Now as a RN, my big task is getting all the documentation in the electronic medical record in the right place by the right time. Fortunately VHC uses Lippincott procedures, so what we learned in GWU lab was excellent practice. Plus you can always look it up again if you need a refresher. The take away is that you will have all the critical thinking skills you need when you are done with the GWU BSN program, the rest is up to you being a person that stands out from all the other applicants as having a passion for people and seeing nursing as a career, not just a job.

I have already seen some members of cohorts 5 and 6 at VHC and have introduced myself. Please come see me on Unit 5A – at 6 feet 2 inches tall, you will not miss me. Message me on Facebook as "Mary Lou Swiscoski". You can read more about me by doing a web search for "GWU Nursing Mary Lou". In closing: enjoy the big and little victories along the way; be your own cheerleader; and read over my favorite quote which is by George Washington Carver who said, “How far you go in life depends on your being tender with the young, compassionate with the aged, sympathetic with the striving and tolerant of the weak and strong. Because someday in your life you will have been all of these.”

Mary Lou Swiscoski, RN
Cohort 4

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**Student Spotlight**

**Dan Mehan** from Cohort 6!

Dan is ACLS certified and currently works as a medic in Loudon County. He is very familiar with dysrhythmias and has been more than willing to help out his fellow classmates by going the extra mile and teaching them. Both his peers and the faculty recognize that Dan has been a great help to his cohort.

**Jen Lambertson** from Cohort 7!

The transition into nursing school is a stressful time and we must rely on support from our peers to help us through. Jen has encouraged cohort bonding by organizing gatherings for her cohort. She has really encouraged her peers to work together since the beginning of the program.
Successful Study Tips

One of the hardest parts of getting through nursing school is finding and maintaining the study system that works best for you. My advice is – once you find it, work hard to support it and you will be successful! Below are a few study tips and methods that have worked well for many of us in the program. Good luck!

- **Be organized and start early** – Whether you use a planner, Google Calendar or simply your brain – make sure you know when all assignments are due and when tests are scheduled. Make a study schedule and stick to it. Always make sure to include planning for breaks!
- **Use color-coding when creating your notes** – use a different color (highlighter or pen) for assessment data, labs, interventions and nursing considerations.
- **Develop a study guide for each week/topic** – doing this helps keep concepts and ideas together as well as making the length of study materials more manageable.
- **Create study groups** – Find people with similar study habits and skills and work together to divide up readings and study guides (see above – each person can do a week!) When people have completed their sections, get together and teach one another about the material – after all, they say the best way to learn is to teach!
- **Use your instructors** – Clinical as well as classroom. We have an unbelievable faculty who are ready and willing to help, answer questions, guide your thinking, etc. One of the best things you can do after a rough test is to go through it with the instructor to ensure your understanding and guide your future learning.
- **Use your peer mentor** – Talking to someone who has walked in your (nursing) shoes and made it out alive is sometimes the greatest way to gain perspective. It is easy to feel overwhelmed in this program but you are not alone!
- **Use your resources** – From Kaplan to review sessions to the “Additional Readings” section of Blackboard. The faculty has worked very hard to ensure that you have materials outside of class to enhance your learning. Use them!
- **Work hard to connect the classroom with clinical** – Bring your notes, study materials, drug cards to clinical. While it is a place to practice skills, it can also be a great place to expand your knowledge and make connections. Quiz yourself and your peers on meds, interventions and nursing responsibilities. This is not only helpful for your care plans but also to enhance your critical thinking!
- **Take care of yourself** – Drink more water than coffee, eat more salads than pizza, get enough sleep and try to get out and get some exercise (even if that just involves doing a couple of laps around Innovation). You have to be able to care for yourself before you can care for someone else.

Phillipa Morse, Cohort 5
Congratulations Cohort 7
SNA E-Board Members!

President - Tamar Weinsweig
Vice President - Jaclyn Storey
Secretary - Christina Gale
Treasurer - Paul Kantor
Historian - Arianna Stagg

Join us as an SNA member at www.nsna.org

Volunteer Opportunities

Shenandoah School of Pharmacy
45085 University Drive, Ashburn VA

Blood Drive - Bloodmobile
Tuesday, April 22nd, 2014
10:00 am - 3:00 pm

Please call 1-800-RED-CROSS or go to www.redcrossblood.org and use sponsor code 05314993 to schedule your life-saving donation.

Eligibility questions call 1-866-236-3276

Park Plex Full Scale Exercise
As part of regional emergency preparedness efforts, Montgomery County is preparing mock mass casualty incidents at South Germantown Recreational Park and needs volunteers! Police, fire, EMS and other agencies will coordinate the response. Each volunteer will receive free Six Flags tickets for your time!

When: Tuesday May 8th - 6:30am-3:00pm

Registration Information: http://mdchhs.com/forms/park-plex-full-scale-exercise-volunteer-registration

Volunteer Coordinator: Marie Warner

Email: mwarner@miemss.org

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